



## Giving Voice to Africans in Northern Ireland, West of the Bann

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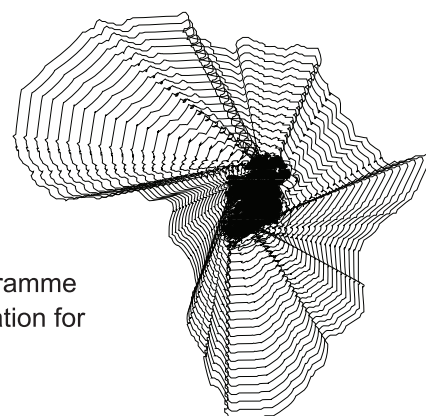
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# Giving a Voice to Africans in Northern Ireland, West of the Bann

Máiréad Nic Craith, Elly Odhiambo, Khanyisela Moyo.  
Academy for Irish Cultural Heritages  
University of Ulster

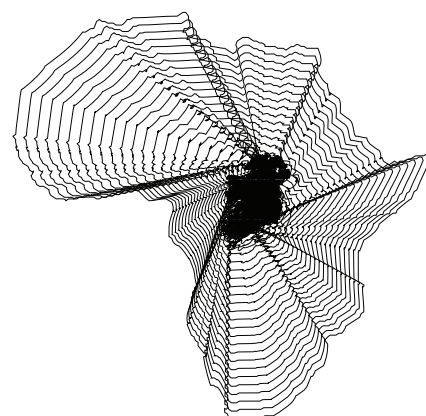
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## Executive Summary

This report seeks to give a voice to Africans who currently live in Northern Ireland. Informants are drawn from West of the Bann and the researchers are ethnographers who work and live within this community. Whilst the report contains a section on statistics, its principal focus is on Africans' perceptions of their host society rather than demographics.

*The report explores two issues:*

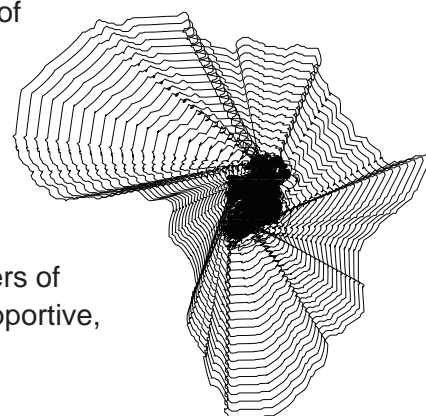
- How the existing literature portrays the African community
- Africans' views of their life in Northern Ireland

*The report contains:*

- General statistics of Africans in Northern Ireland
- A profile of the informants in terms of their nationalities, gender, religious backgrounds, year of arrival and memories of their first encounter with Northern Irish society
- A review of the informants' educational backgrounds and language skills
- A section on employment issues which gives an insight into the community's employment status and conditions
- An examination of Africans' interaction with public bodies and community organisations
- Africans' perceptions of race relations in Northern Ireland

*Key findings*

- Africans in Northern Ireland are from very diverse backgrounds
- Most of them are highly educated and multilingual
- There are no accurate numeric estimates of Africans in the UK, Ireland and Northern Ireland
- Despite their impressive academic backgrounds most of our respondents are under-employed
- Most respondents have positive experiences with the educational and health sectors. They seem to be dissatisfied with the work of the police
- Most participants are ambivalent on the gains of participation in community organisations
- The most significant challenge to Africans in Northern Ireland is racism. This is in spite of the existence of a number of legislation and policy guidance that seek to address race relations in this society. A majority of our respondents stated that although most members of the host community are warm-hearted and supportive,

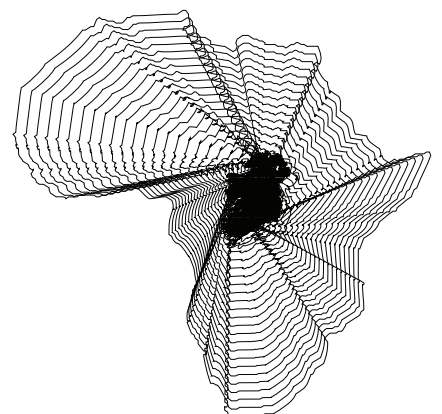


- Africans are regularly exposed to both subtle and direct racism
- Most Africans in Northern Ireland intend to stay, yet there is an absence of academic research on their experiences. Analogous work has focused on other ethnic minorities

### *Recommendations*

We suggest that there is a need for

- Proactive measures in addressing racism
- Employers to prevent, protect and fulfil their statutory obligations on ensuring that the work environment is free of racism
- More opportunities for inter-racial interaction and English classes in addition to interpreters and bilingual staff
- Further, rigorously structured and standardised research which could lead to some generalisations
- Cross-border research to provide a holistic picture on Africans in the region

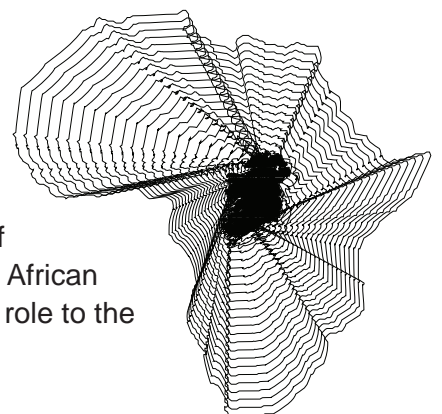


## Background and Methodology

The presence of Africans in Europe from early times has received much academic attention, particularly in recent times.<sup>1</sup> However, academic research on Africans in Ireland is vastly more limited and seems largely focused on the Republic<sup>2</sup>. Research on the African-Irish relationship in Northern Ireland is sparse, and interest in the African continent seems largely confined to peace and conflict issues in a comparative context.<sup>3</sup> Multiculturalism is not new to either Ireland or the United Kingdom. For example, Bill Hart's 2002 study highlights the existence of black Africans in Ireland in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Randal Hansen has shown that the United Kingdom has not been homogenous since 1945.<sup>5</sup> However, several scholars including Hansen have also noted that since 1962, British immigration policy has been racialised, that is, immigration rules are hostile to black migration.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, a number of scholars have produced theoretical work on migration patterns in the UK and Ireland.<sup>7</sup> Some of this work has given explanations for the movement of Africans to Ireland and even researched on who the first Africans to arrive in Northern Ireland were.<sup>8</sup> There are also several reports which have sought to demonstrate that in Northern Ireland the previous pre-occupation with the sectarian divide has clouded a vibrant, evolving, and ethnic pluralism.<sup>9</sup> A number of detailed summaries and discussions on the significance of this development have already been produced and are provided elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> For the intentions of this research report, two particular observations will be made. The first is the lack of research which looks closely at Africans in Northern Ireland. In most cases, this community is either treated as a transient and insignificant group or simply it is clubbed together with other black and minority ethnic groups. Secondly, there is no accurate picture of the population of Africans in Northern Ireland. Much of the information on this matter is either outdated or it is based on questionable research methods. It is axiomatic that the present report would not be able to give an accurate answer on the second issue. However, the aim is to offer for the first time an insight into the experiences of Africans in Northern Ireland, drawing from this 'invisible' group in the West of the Bann.

The project was originally conceived by Prof. Máiréad Nic Craith and Dr Rachel Naylor, and it has been generously funded by European Peace II funding via the Community Relations Council. Its central aim was to conduct ethnographic research and seek to answer central anthropological questions concerning the ways of life of the African community in Northern Ireland. A research advisory group was established consisting of university academics and researchers as well as local African community representatives. The group had a steering role to the



research project. The primary researcher on the project, Elly Odhiambo, is of African background, and is currently living in Northern Ireland. Khaniysela Moyo subsequently joined the research team. Their ethnographic experience was invaluable as they both live in and spend a lot of time with the community which is the subject of study. This is a crucial aspect of any ethnographic research as it ensures that research findings provide an 'emic' rather than an 'etic' perspective.

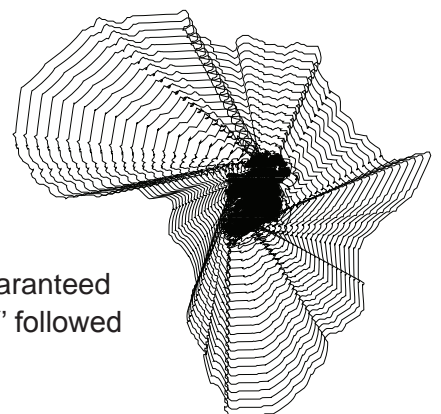
The initial phase of research focused on information already available on Africans in Northern Ireland. However, it was quickly established that much of this material was of a statistical nature, which is inaccurate and constantly changing. Although statistics are always of immediate concern to those interested in migrant communities, the steering group advised against focusing on numbers in this research project. Their advice was based on a genuine concern that the informants might feel threatened by work of a statistical nature – this would particularly apply to those whose existence in Northern Ireland is under legal review.

The researchers aimed to assess the knowledge and ideas that have been established on Africans in Northern Ireland and to analyse their strengths and weaknesses. This was done through a literature review on the African community in Ireland and UK. The bibliographic resource was supplemented by the establishment of contacts for data collection through formal and informal means. An initial symposium with participants who came from a variety of networks, individuals, public institutions, university and college academics, and members of community groups was also held.

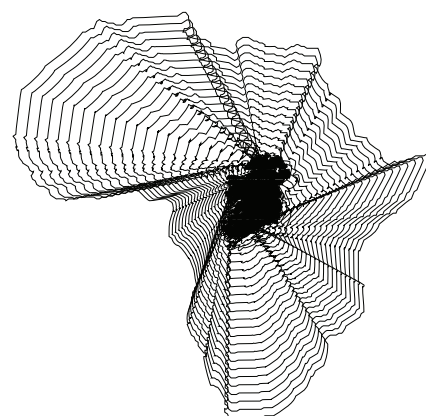
As this is an ethnographic project, the primary method has been interviewing. Initially, the researchers conducted ten pilot interviews based on open-ended questions (University procedures in relation to ethical procedures were followed scrupulously). Again, it should be pointed out that the research did not aim at addressing issues of demographics, but rather sought to provide a "portrait of people" which might possibly inform further structured research on Africans in Northern Ireland. Subsequently, a further 40 ethnographic interviews of Africans living in the West of the Bann were undertaken. The choice of location was deliberate as it gave visibility to a group which is truly invisible. It was also informed by the view that effective ethnographic research ought to focus on a group of a relatively small scale.

Throughout the project the researchers engaged with the community; they collected any site documents available, and maintained detailed field notes. As well as conducting participants observation, the research team also organised symposia through which they could engage with other researchers in the field. The symposia were attended by Africans, their support networks, councils and policy makers this work partly seeks to influence. A storytelling evening was also held on which occasions Africans who attended could discuss their experience in Northern Ireland openly. The participants also compared their life experience here to that in their countries of origin.

This report contains the evidence gathered in a limited period of thirteen months. As its aim is to give voice to Africans themselves, and allow their voices to be heard, the report provides a number of quotations from the interviews throughout. All our interviewees were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality, and thus they are referred to simply by 'Y' followed



by a number. A report such as this cannot possibly address all of the pertinent issues at present, and it may raise numerous questions while also managing to highlight an area of increasing significance for policy in Northern Ireland as well as future research.





## General Statistics

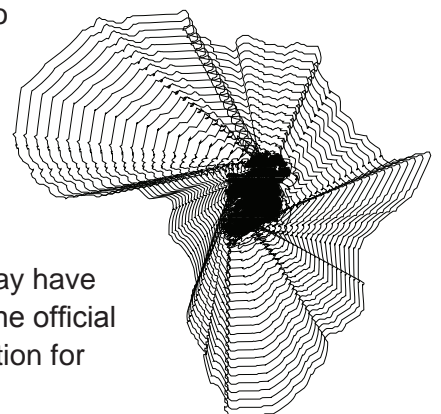
As noted above our research study is not for quantitative statistical purposes. Nonetheless, this section challenges past and presumably ongoing miscalculations of the experiences of Africans through an over reliance on the issues of numbers in research on migration. For example, a recent online TV media report has indicated that for every 1,000 people in Northern Ireland there are 1 black, 2 Asians, 2 mixed races, 991 whites, etc...<sup>11</sup> Given that the population of Northern Ireland is currently 1.7 million, this would suggest that there are at least 1,700 blacks in the region. While the estimate includes individuals from other 'black' cultural or social polities, it excludes non-black Africans. The exclusion of this 'minority within a minority' was a recurring issue in our research.

It is actually difficult to tell the number of Africans in UK, Ireland and Northern Ireland. This can be attributed largely to the fact that Africa is a diverse continent and most of its countries are subject to different immigration rules. For example, citizens of some African countries do not require visas to enter the UK.<sup>12</sup> This makes record keeping difficult. Also, some Africans who have been living in UK, Ireland or Northern Ireland for a long time have since acquired the host country's citizenship.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, a number of studies have attempted to give numeric estimates of Africans in these countries.

In the case of UK, the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR)'s 2006 study estimated that there were 722,500 black Africans, that is about 1.3 per cent of UK's total population<sup>14</sup>. The study also found that mixed black and white Africans were roughly 76,250, or 0.1 per cent of the population. In the Republic of Ireland, the 2002 census stated that the population of Africans was of 20,981.<sup>15</sup> This number has since doubled, as was evidenced by the 2006 Ireland population census, which indicated that at the time there were 39,734 people of African origin living in the country, that is 0.98 per cent of the total population.

One of the first indications of the number of Africans living in Northern Ireland is to be found in a small study on the languages of Northern Ireland commissioned by the Multi-cultural Resource Centre. This research was conducted just before the official 2001 census by Daniel Holder, who employed a technique called snowballing. The report estimated 1,600 Africans in Northern Ireland, yet it also suggested that the community may have increased to 2,000<sup>16</sup>.

To date, the only official source of the size of the African population in Northern Ireland is the 2001 census according to which there were 494 Black Africans, that is 0.03 per cent of the total population of the region (1,689,319 at the time). Several researchers and organisations have argued that this number is too low. There are a number reasons for this, not least the fact that many minority groups may have been reluctant or unable to identify themselves on the census form.<sup>17</sup> The official categorisation was in itself problematic because it did not include a section for



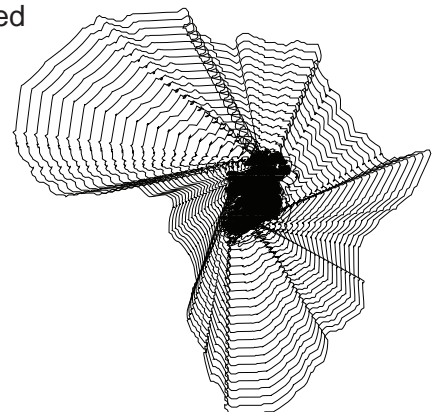
white Africans; it is also possible that a number of Africans were merged with the 'other black', 'other Asian' or 'other ethnic group' columns of the report.

In the 2001 census, 3,118 individuals indicated that they were born in Africa, but this does not necessarily imply that they had African nationality. It was also reported that there were 3,111 people from Africa under the category of 'Country of Birth by Ethnic Group'. This category does not specify the number of Africans and of African nationalities that were present in Northern Ireland at the time<sup>18</sup>. There are other problems with the data: thus, for example, 4 geographical regions of Africa are found in the same column as 4 African countries, namely Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Zimbabwe, and these are taken to represent the whole of the continent. According to the category 'country of birth by sex and age', the census indicated that there were 2,337 migrants from the South and Eastern-African regions living in Northern Ireland. There were also more males than females (1,269 to 1,069) in the 16-59 age range; and it should be added that these were not necessarily citizens or nationals of countries in the African continent.

Thus, the 2001 figures appear to be rather flawed since they triggered a guessing game of the African population as the column categories or row samples that were used to represent the estimated data clearly show. Even more interesting is the fact that according to the census there were 1,301 South African-born people in Northern Ireland.<sup>19</sup> It is also unclear whether these figures referred to UK citizens or *bona fide* African nationals. The findings are significant nevertheless since the 2001 census was the first official attempt to use the category of ethnic identity to accommodate the African population in a study in Northern Ireland.<sup>20</sup> Prior to that, the invisibility of the African population in the region was shown inadvertently in the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) publications.

NISRA has since indicated that they will address the difficulties of updating population counts by combining different official sources of information. The sources are varied, and some are strictly relevant to the European Union A8 countries (the legal significance of this is to be discussed later in the employment section). NISRA has developed a model of sourcing quarterly updates of data about Africans and other immigrants based on the information provided by statutory bodies including the health sector, the Department of Work and Pensions/Social Security Agency, the Department of Education, and the Police Service of Northern Ireland<sup>21</sup>. Their sources are:

- The Home Office Work Permits Scheme
- The International Passenger Survey (IPS)<sup>22</sup>
- The new national insurance numbers registered to foreign nationals
- The Department of Education Annual School Census
- The country of birth of new Northern Ireland mothers
- New registrations with a family doctor



According to NISRA, the Health Card Registrations for mid-year estimates showed that there was a small net increase in migration to Northern Ireland in 2003-2004 by at least 100 newcomers.<sup>23</sup> However, such health data cannot be fully reliable because the researcher has to show deregistration or actual registration of new migrants who use the health system in Northern Ireland. Actually, most of our respondents did not indicate whether they had been registered with a local health practitioner in Northern Ireland.

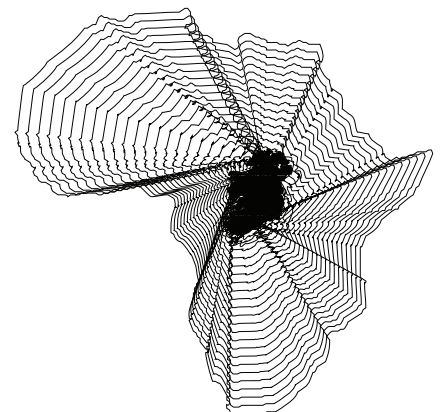
Of course, the Family Doctor Registration data gives important information including the intention of migrants to stay for a period of time. However, as NISRA suggests, this methodology of data collection has an anomaly because the health card registrations do not necessarily correspond to the calendar year of the mid-year population reports.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, as is also the case with other migrants, Africans may take time to register for a health card. Some of the inaccuracies of this method are evident in the table below, which confines the concept of Africans to two countries: South Africa and Nigeria.

**Table 1 Northern Ireland Health Card Registration – Africans**

	Health Card Registrations	Estimated Health Card Registrations
Country	(2005)	(2006)*
South Africa	206	200
Nigeria	26	100

Table 1.8: NI Health Card Registrations from outside the UK by country of last residence [2005 – 2006] NISRA, Central Services Agency, May 2007

The figures above show a minimal collection of data in relation to Health Card Registrations of citizens of other African countries. Any researcher focusing their work on the theme of Africans in this region would legitimately question the extent to which two African nationalities (Nigeria and South Africa) can be indicative of almost two dozen of different countries represented by the African population in Northern Ireland. Despite these reservations, it is possible that the efficiency of the NISRA model could lead to its future adoption by public bodies as a method of acquiring more reliable population data. However, as with any other form of census methodology, complete accuracy cannot be assured.



## Profile of the Respondents

Having noted the inaccuracy of these statistics and the advice of the steering group, the research team began to focus on the process of interviewing. In total, 50 ethnographic interviews were conducted which involved 19 females and 31 men who identified themselves as Africans. Some discussions on the concept of 'African' took place, and it was concluded that for the purposes of this report self-identification was the sole criterion. In other words, the informant had to identify him- or herself as African. This approach is not without problems; for example, some Sudanese interviewees preferred to report their asylum status rather than their nationality. There are difficulties in interpreting what is experienced or characterized per nationality; and so our ethnographic research on Africans in the West of the Bann rationalizes the use of the term 'Africans' not in its homogenous capacity, but rather as people who share similar experiences in Northern Ireland.

The statistics in Table 2 illustrate the range of nationalities involved in this survey and clearly show the diversity of African nationalities in Northern Ireland, West of the Bann. The informants cited 18 different African countries as their places of birth. Only 2 (that is, 4 per cent of the total) were born in Northern Ireland, while others indicated that they had dual nationality (mostly an African and a European country). Such a duality is common with citizens from

**Table 2 Respondent Gender and Country of Birth**

Country of origin	Female	Male	Total
Angola		2	2
Cape Verde	3	3	6
Congo	1		1
Egypt		1	1
Ethiopia		1	1
Ghana	1	2	3
Guinea Bissau		6	6
Kenya	2	2	4
Malawi		1	1
Nigeria	1	3	4
Cameroon	1	2	3
Rwanda	1		1
Senegal	1		1
South Africa	4	1	5
Sudan	2	1	3
Uganda	1	1	2
British/Zambia <sup>25</sup>		1	
Zambia		1	2
Zimbabwe	1	2	3

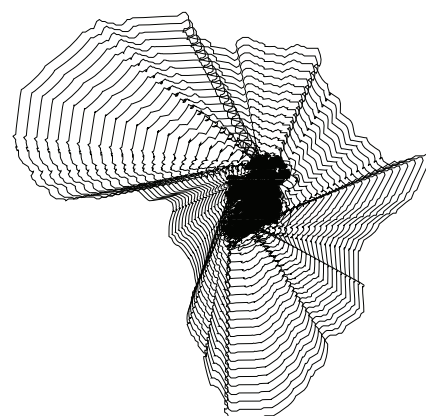
Lusophone countries (Portuguese-speaking or former colonies of Portugal such as Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau). It is worth noting that immigration is not as complex for Africans from Lusophone countries as it is for those whose countries were once colonized by Britain for example. This is because Portugal is one of the few EU countries which allows dual citizenship to people from its former colonies. As a result, it is easier for them to move to Europe, and to Northern Ireland for that matter.

Some aspects of the above range require further discussion. The gender imbalance is notable, in fact, the 38 per cent representation of women might suggest a pattern of migration to Northern Ireland with a propensity to attract men more than women from Africa. This trend could also suggest that men have greater disposable resources such as income and networks to help them migrate. It cannot be excluded that women emigration has been precluded by factors such as child care. Of course, the small numbers surveyed in this first exercise cannot be used to make a conclusive statement on overall experiences of African women; however, it emerges that there may be gender issues relating to African migration to Northern Ireland.

The religious profile of this target group is interesting: of the 50 informants 36 identified themselves as Christians; one indicated that he was an animist or practised traditional belief systems; and 13, that is 26 per cent of the total, identified themselves as Muslims. This last figure shows that Africans are also part of a growing Muslim population in Northern Ireland. The remaining respondents also gave their religious denomination but specified that they are non-practising Christians or non-practising Muslims.

**Table 3: Year of arrival of African migrants in Northern Ireland**

Year of Arrival	Respondents
1981	1
1984	1
1994	1
1995	1
1996	2
1998	1
2000	2
2001	2
2002	2
2003	5
2004	3
2005	8
2006	5
2007	14



Many of our respondents were keen to outline their experiences of arrival in Northern Ireland. The majority of them arrived after 2002, that is four years after the Good Friday Agreement (1998). Our survey would indicate a steady increase in the migration patterns since then. While one of our respondents arrived in 1981, one in 1984, and another in 1994, 8 arrived in 2006, and 15 in 2007. See years of arrival in Table 3:

It is reasonable to suggest that the 1998 peace agreement that ushered a new era for Northern Ireland is also responsible for increasing in-migration, including that of African newcomers. This understanding is expressed in our research.<sup>26</sup> In this respect, an informant who came to Northern Ireland in 2006 stated that:

I should have been here earlier; I came to the University of Ulster in 2002 for an interview and was offered a job. But the peace situation got me a bit concerned, so I didn't take up the job because of the bombs. So I took a job in Nottingham University, Trent then after working there I returned home ... I applied again here, because of the peace dividend, and then I was offered the job here.<sup>27</sup>

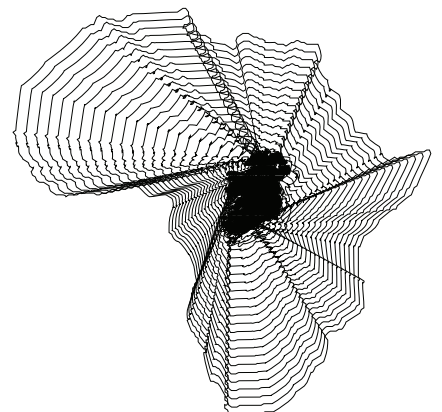
Previous research has noted that family and friendship networks are influential to people's decision move to Ireland.<sup>28</sup> This is also the case with Africans who arrive in Northern Ireland. As an informant stated:

The first time I came to NI was in 1994. Then after, I visited on and off then settled in 2002. My step dad is from here; Northern Ireland.<sup>29</sup>

Another explained that he came to Ireland at the invitation of a family relation.<sup>30</sup> Overall the informants' reasons for coming to Northern Ireland were varied and included *inter alia* political problems in their home countries, the need to pursue further education, career development and economic gain.

In fact, five of the 50 people interviewed made a clear connection between conflict in their countries of origin and their decision to migrate. These informants were originally from Zimbabwe, Congo, Sudan and Angola. The levels and forms of persecution varied from being forced to sing for an authoritarian regime, to coercion to join the army, and physical attacks on family members. For example, the Zimbabwean respondent stated that:

Back home I was in big trouble. The musician I was playing with, in his band was supporting Robert Mugabe. They didn't want me to leave. They told me I had to stay with them for a full year. We used sing for Mugabe. I wanted a stop to this. The next thing you just see a jeep pulling up your door. In terms of money





was okay. But it was not good. My life was under threat with the opposition party because I was in that band. I couldn't get on the bus or public transport. I had to take taxis. You have the money and everything but it was very difficult. Another musician told me he has to come with me to the UK. And we came.<sup>31</sup>

The Congolese stated that:

I have travelled to many countries since the war started with the fall of Mobutu in 1997. We lost many people in our family because of this war. Do you know that more than 4 million people have died in this war and nothing has been achieved by this entire people fighting and killing? I think Africa has a very big problem compared to the problems we face here. I cry for Africa.<sup>32</sup>

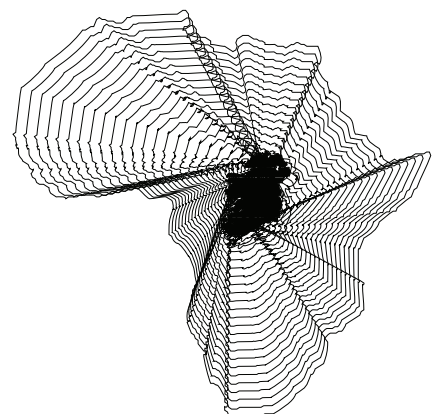
Similar messages came from our Sudanese informants who fled the killing in Darfur.<sup>33</sup> Yet, the type of persecution faced by the Angolan respondent was slightly different, and his solution to the problem was not necessarily to claim asylum in Europe. He stated that:

I left Angola 18 years ago in 1990 because of the war and civil unrest, I was forced to join the army so I went to Portugal and was there for 10 years before coming to Northern Ireland in 200

It is noteworthy that there were a number of informants who did not come directly to Northern Ireland. Some used to live in England, Wales or Scotland before they came to Northern Ireland, so their earlier arrival in UK prepared them for adjustment to conditions in the region. According to one informant:

Having lived in the UK, I knew what to expect so I just asked for directions. The religion I identify with is Christianity namely the Pentecostal church. To be honest I have not found any Pentecostal church in this area of Derry<sup>35</sup>

Generally, those interviewed gave different accounts of their early memories of arrival in Northern Ireland. More than a tenth of the respondents clearly stated that at first they were not comfortable with the wet and cold weather. Almost all of the Africans interviewed indicated that they had been received well by their neighbours, the host community or host families they had lived with on arrival. Earlier arrivals claimed that the locals were much more pleasant to immigrants then than they are now. Sentiments that people in Northern Ireland are considerably more pleasant than those in Scotland and England were also raised.

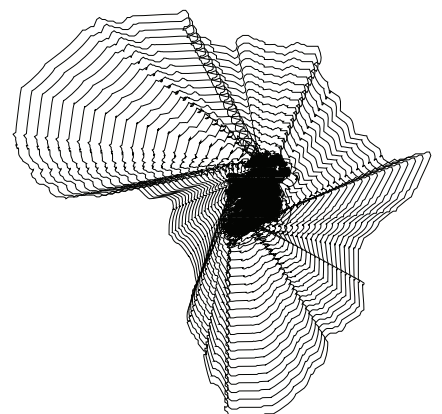


There are of course those who faced a number of settling challenges. An informant stated thus:

I first came to Northern Ireland in 2004. I have some good memories. I arrived on 7<sup>th</sup> of July 2004. I was very lonely ... I was the only person from my culture in this local community. It was unbearable. My children arrived the following year in April, then I was happy. I became instantly happy when my children arrived in 2005.<sup>36</sup>

Another African male also informed us that he had faced some difficulties in the early stages of his arrival. He told us:

I came to Northern Ireland in 2002. It was very cold on that day, the weather was just bad. I had nowhere to stay or live. We really struggled to get a place to stay, myself and my wife. We were accommodated in a single room and a single bed with my wife. We stayed there for a number of weeks, it was a dormitory.<sup>37</sup>





## Education and Languages

Our research findings indicate that the Africans who have arrived here are very well educated. 16 out of our 50 informants, or 32 per cent of them, have university degree qualifications; 4 have doctoral degrees, and 2 are Professors. Another 2, one female and a male, are currently conducting doctoral research. In total, 8 other individuals, 16 per cent of the total, have achieved college education in technical institutes, they have completed medical training or other further education diplomas. It is also apparent that most of the people interviewed have attained their basic education and in some cases first degrees in their countries of birth.

While one might suggest that these high levels of education are biased as a result of our research being conducted in a university location, it is clearly in line with the 2001 UK census which indicates that 70 per cent of young Black African women and 72 per cent of men were in full-time education at the time.<sup>38</sup> Also, around a fifth of the adult population in this category was qualified to degree level.

Interestingly, the narratives given by Africans who are studying in the West of the Bann consistently show that they are happy with access to education in Northern Ireland, both in the manner in which these institutions work and in the way their goals for an academic pursuit are met. An informant stated thus:

Everything here is quite different compared to the research environment back home. There are plenty of library books, good internet access; the method of teaching is very different, good. It is on a one-to-one basis.<sup>39</sup>

In hindsight, the claim of better education systems is made in comparison to their home countries. Nonetheless, Africans seem to have a strong desire to further their studies more-so considering that not all of them are recipients of a scholarship or a grant. According to one informant:

I wanted to do a PhD in transitional justice-related field and I met one person in Brussels from the international centre for transitional justice and this person told me to try University of Ulster because they offer a very good course on this and they are very experienced. So I went to the University of Ulster website and read the information about this course area and that's why I was interested in the university. I am not on a scholarship. My registration is self-funded so it is quite expensive.<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, studying in UK is a very expensive process for international students as they have to pay thrice the amount which is paid by local students.

Apart from their high levels of education, most of our informants are multilingual. In fact, 34 different languages are spoken amongst them including European languages such as English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese. This is a remarkable range of languages especially in a British-Irish context where people tend to speak one language only. Previous research on the linguistic ability of migrants has focused on ethnic minorities generally, rather than Africans in particular.<sup>41</sup> Such research has indicated that language is one of the key barriers to the access of services on the part of most ethnic minorities that were not born in UK or Ireland.<sup>42</sup> Thus, scholars have recommended that there is a need for more interpreters and bilingual staff.<sup>43</sup> While such findings may hold true for groups such as the Chinese, they do not necessarily apply to the African community as well.<sup>44</sup>

Almost 85 per cent of our participants could communicate in the English language effectively; their major hurdle was with the local accents and those expressions which are peculiar to the Northern Irish variety of English. A respondent commented as follows:

I have absolutely no language problems with the people living here. It is just quite ok for me to be able to understand the people of this land. Maybe it is difficult for some people; the only thing could be a bit of the accents that they have.<sup>45</sup>

Another one informed us that:

I returned from holiday and somebody said 'you are back to porridge' so I didn't understand what they said or 'you are on the pig's back so you have to look out and understand these phrases.'<sup>46</sup>

Even the 15 per cent who required an interpreter for our interviews seemed to realise that knowledge of the English language was an asset. From their perspective, this would help them to integrate and access better employment. Some of them have actually learnt the acquired language, and thus overcome the language-associated barriers. A participant stated thus:

My first language is Portuguese. I can speak a bit of English and have managed to get by so far. I have been able to access health services without the services of an interpreter. My girlfriend is a local person and we communicate in English.<sup>47</sup>

Another remarked that:

My acquired language (English) is very good. At the moment I can even speak better English than my first language – Portuguese – I have no known language barriers.<sup>48</sup>

Actually, this group makes a sort of special case as they are mostly based in Dungannon and Portadown and were recruited by an agency in Portugal to work at meat and chicken factories. The motivation to learn the language is self-evidently career advancement since in such factories those who are proficient in English assume the role of line manager. One of the participants remarked that:

Bissau. I am not very good in English although I can pick up a few words. I am however making an effort to learn and talk to people around me. In my job, language was not an issue, there was no communication – we only had to work like slaves, that is why the factory employ people with no language skills like me ... and we have no option since we have limited choices in terms of employment. In the factory the only language of communication was the whip ... just like a slave.<sup>49</sup>

It is frequently the case that even those with good language skills can have difficulties in expressing themselves in an acquired language. A participant from the Portuguese-speaking community who opted to be interviewed in English stated that:

I speak English although I sometimes fail to express myself properly. For example, when we went to report our racial incident to the police, we did not have the right words to use. Language is however not an issue where I work because there is no communication.<sup>50</sup>

Another participant stated that he was willing to take English language classes but was prevented from attending because of the costs and the quality of the classes. Learning the language was not a big priority for him since his line manager is also from the Portuguese community. He advised thus:

My first language is Portuguese. The English from Northern Ireland is very complex; it is difficult for me to communicate with the locals. My lack of language skills is however not a barrier to accessing services as service providers tend to accommodate my interests. At work the language issue does not crop up because my supervisor is Portuguese. I have heard about English classes (ESOL) but I have not been there because I have been informed that these classes are not good, the classes are no so beneficial, the tutors speak fast. The other problem is that we have to pay for the English classes. I am looking for a proper English class which would not waste my time and money.<sup>51</sup>

Another African who is proficient in English expressed a concern that while she could communicate with the locals effectively, she could not speak to other African ethnic minorities. Consider this response:

My first language is Shona, but I have no problems communicating in English since English is the language of instruction in my home country, Zimbabwe. I only have problems communicating with ethnic minorities here, that is, the Portuguese-speaking, Polish and Lithua

Yet, another informant stated that even if he wanted to learn the language it would be useless since some local people are not willing to talk to ethnic minorities:

My first language is Fula – a native language from Guinea-Bissau, and I can also speak Portuguese. It is difficult to talk to local people in English because some people do not even want to talk to us. Because I do not speak English, I am given a hard time in the shops, work, etc.<sup>53</sup>

It was observed that this participant had a Lithuanian girlfriend who could not speak either English or Portuguese. The young man was slowly gaining proficiency in the Lithuanian language just through interactions with his partner.

### Employment

Given their educational achievements and linguistic skills, one might be forgiven for thinking that African workers in Northern Ireland and the West of the Bann in particular would easily compete for jobs. However, only five of the respondents, or 10 per cent of them, have secure fulltime employment, which they consider to be commensurate with their educational achievements. Actually, a number of people who worked in meat factories in Dungannon and Portadown had diplomas of some sort.

In comparison to those residing in bigger places like Belfast City, migrants living in the West of the Bann area may be in a difficult position when searching employment. Empirical data from the Northern Ireland Labour Market Report of June 2006 highlight the fact that 5.1 per cent of the working age population of the Derry area claim unemployment benefit. This compares very unfavourably with the 2.6 per cent average across the province as a whole.<sup>54</sup> This latest information on employment statistics could explain why many Africans who had originally come to live in Derry moved to the East of the Bann at a later stage, and sought employment in urban centres such as Belfast, or in factories in the geographical east of the region. An informant told us that:

I am employed. I work in a private company as a machine operator. About job satisfaction, I believe it depends on what you mean by job satisfaction. It is there to pay the bills and I am satisfied. If Belfast was a reasonable distance or was nearer, we could have moved because there are more job opportunities there.<sup>55</sup>

70 per cent, or 35 of the 50 people interviewed, are in full and part time employment. 8 of them are fulltime students either in colleges or universities

in Northern Ireland; two were jobless at the time of being interviewed; one was in fulltime voluntary work with a charitable organisation. There were also three asylum seekers whose cases were still pending, which meant that they could not take up employment legally. The remaining respondent declined to address the issue of his area of work. Overall, it appears to us that the majority of these Africans are in the working class band of the economic or income status. Thus, despite their high qualifications Africans in the West of the Bann are largely confined to underpaid manual labour. This explains why the community is left in the growing underclass. The situation is considerably more pronounced among women.

One could also infer that some Africans lose their skills during their time of employment in Northern Ireland; in fact, some auxiliary nurses raised concerns relating to the insincerity of their employer and of the job agency that recruited them. Most of these nurses have not been given the opportunity to transfer their nursing training skills to the hospital sector in Northern Ireland. Instead, most of them have ended up as auxiliary nurses. One of them stated that:

The employment agency that recruited me from South Africa is a global company. They recruit many South Africans. The company looks for the employer on behalf of the applicant after submitting your CV ... They sent us work permits after we agreed to take the offer and we applied for visas. We started with induction. I have been in this job now since I came to Northern Ireland. I really don't mind at the moment. Nursing here is a different setting. At home I was working at the hospital and here I am in a nursing home.<sup>56</sup>

Similarly, another respondent informed us that:

I work as a nurse and my job is not too bad. Sometimes I wish I could get the job I trained for though – an in-charge you know, registered nurse. It is a high pressure job but I think the money you earn is much better. I know this because some of the people I work with, mostly local people, they are registered nurses. There is nothing they can do that I can't do. We are just the same, but we immigrants are not being given the same deal by the employer. So for now, I will continue doing auxiliary duties.<sup>57</sup>

Similar sentiments were raised by other people who were not necessarily nurses. According to one respondent:

I work in McDonalds. I work there part-time. No, I don't feel a sense of satisfaction with this job. It's not in my field at all. Back home I was working with World Bank/IMF (International Monetary Fund). I was a Monitoring and Evaluation officer and I was reporting to the Country Office of the Bank.<sup>58</sup>

Of course, there are exceptional cases. An academic stated that:

I already had a fair international reputation in conflict resolution. I worked as an independent consultant for 6 to 7 years. In terms of job security, my field is just the same as back home<sup>59</sup>.

Self-employment was a very uncommon phenomenon among Africans living in the West of the Bann area. This is in contrast with the situation in Britain and Ireland where Africans have ventured into businesses ranging from the service industry, hospitality, cleaning, vehicle repair, security, retail, media and many other sectors of the economy. Only 2 per cent of our informants had gone into business in the region. However, this group has also expressed concern about the dismal profits, if any, in their trade. A respondent stated thus:

I am self-employed. My wife and I run this small business. I have a shop in Belfast that sells hair products in Belfast and for the last few years, I have been running one here in Derry. It is more difficult here in Derry. In Belfast, the specialist products we sell for the African and even European market go really fast. In Derry, we are not getting many customers. It all depends; sometimes I can make £250 a day and sometimes completely nothing. Well, the shop rent has to be paid as well and other overheads<sup>60</sup>.

This businessman who is originally from Uganda has since moved to the East of the Bann (Belfast), where he continues to trade in the retail sector. It cannot be concluded from a single response that the business environment is not favourable for migrant-owned businesses in parts of the West of the Bann. However, it can be submitted that the readily available cosmopolitan market in Belfast gives certain trade sectors better prospects of sustaining themselves.

Another former businessman who has settled well in the Aughnacloy/Tyrone area talked about the complexity of running a business as a migrant worker in the region. He stated thus:

I was self employed; I had my own business here in Northern Ireland. I couldn't find someone to work for me that I could employ. I put the advert there in the Jobcentre and no local person was interested. So I closed my business. The migrants around here started arriving in 2003 to work and if I knew this I could still be running my business. But there was a time I went to try and get a loan and the bank manager looked at me with doubts.<sup>61</sup>

Many of those interviewed were not satisfied with the money they earned, as evidenced in the narrative below:

I am employed but I am currently on maternity leave. I am a production operative at a factory in X. I do not really like my job. The good thing is that I did not have a problem finding this job but I do not think that I could easily get a better one because I have to



learn English first. In the beginning, I was happy with the money I get on this job because I was comparing with what I could get in Portugal. Now I think that I deserve more money because the job is tough.<sup>62</sup>

Similarly, another informant expressed his view and stated that:

I work as a production operative at a factory in X. I like my job. I had no problems finding a job since I was recruited by an agency when I was still in Portugal. I have never tried to find a better job although the money which I get here is not enough since I have to pay bills both here and in Portugal.<sup>63</sup>

It should be noted that unlike the two informants above and others who were also recruited by agencies in foreign countries, the rest of our participants experienced some difficulties in finding a job. A number of them stated that it was not easy to get a job in Northern Ireland, and they attributed this difficulty to racism and other practical hurdles. One respondent affirmed that:

Some places I cannot even work because they say that we are taking the jobs from them.<sup>64</sup>

A white respondent attributed such difficulties to skin colour. In her view, Black Africans can face some of these sentiments on a daily basis. Regarding jobs, she maintained that:

It is also a colonial dynamic, so if you are white from a former British colony they are comfortable with that. But they don't do the same with Eastern Europeans or other Africans. They just see them as immigrants taking their jobs etc.<sup>65</sup>

Yet, another informant stated that he could not find a job because he did not have a National Insurance number and lacked the experience:

I had problems trying to get a job. They would call me to get a National Insurance number. I would tell them I don't have an Insurance number, they would refer me to the job centre. The job centre would then tell me that I need to show them a job offer before they give me an insurance number. Each time I went to this entire place I was seeing new faces all the time so I told them, I know you are recruiting. I told them that I need a letter of rejection at least to be satisfied with their actions.<sup>66</sup>

Because this same student had never worked in a fast-food shop before, he found it even more difficult to be accepted for those types of jobs. Thus:

They asked me several times if I had experience. They don't want to employ you if you don't have experience.<sup>67</sup>

Most significantly, only one of the Africans surveyed said that she went to court with the support of a public sector trade union and challenged the Home Office decision not to renew her working visa. None of the interviewees went to a court or tribunal to seek legal redress for any of the employment-related injustices they narrated, which include racial prejudice and unfair dismissal. We received two allegations of unfair dismissal. One informant told us that:

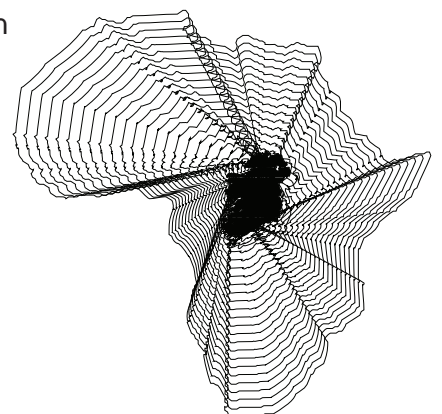
Where I used to work, I accidentally brushed against a local girl who went and reported me to the management and I was sacked. I had no option but to go.<sup>68</sup>

The other stated that:

I have just lost my job. I used to work in a meat factory. It was a very difficult job. I had no option really – I had to do it. There are no options for black people; we are just presented with unsatisfactory jobs. I used to get the minimum wage in my previous job although the job was tough and we deserved more for it. I was not even entitled to a holiday yet I worked long hours. Let me explain how I lost my job – At work, I was entitled to a 20 minutes break, since I was exhausted I used this time to go to the canteen and put my head down. The manager saw me and assumed that I was drunk and sacked me. I did not know what to do, so I just went home.<sup>69</sup>

A good question to pose here would be whether the Equality Commission of Northern Ireland is, or is not, in a better statutory and legal position to intervene in cases of unlawful discrimination of immigrants by employers. Currently, in Northern Ireland, most employers have signed up to the Fair Employment statutes. As an incentive, those who join the scheme are named as Equal Opportunities Employers. This scheme is supportive of worker grievances and goes to the extent of removing violating employers' names from the list of equal opportunities employers. Also, in terms the 1997 Employment Provisions of the Race Relations Order (NI) (1997 Order), all employers, including public authorities, sub-contractors and franchises, and regardless of their size, are obliged to observe provisos relating to discrimination.<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, the 1997 Order makes employers liable for acts of discrimination committed by their employees in the course of their employment. This is regardless of whether the acts were done with the employers' knowledge or approval. The only exception is made if the employer is able to show that s/he acted as it was reasonably practicable in order to prevent discrimination. In 2004, approximately 22 per cent of the overseas workers in Northern Ireland reported that they had experienced harassment or discrimination at work.





## Public Bodies and Community Organisations

Many of our respondents largely associated the notion of 'public and statutory bodies' with the police and the health sector. The statement below sums up their key comments on their relationship with these bodies:

I am not happy with the police because when we need them they are not there, when we do not need them they appear – and sometimes they are racists. I have no problems with the health sector; I was treated well in hospital although they sometimes take too long to attend to emergencies. I am happy with the education sector – I have two sons who go to school here and I do not think that they are being discriminated against.<sup>71</sup>

One respondent, who worked as a social worker, raised the concern that the area of social services needed to be addressed. Another complained against institutional racial stereotyping within some public and statutory bodies. He stated thus:

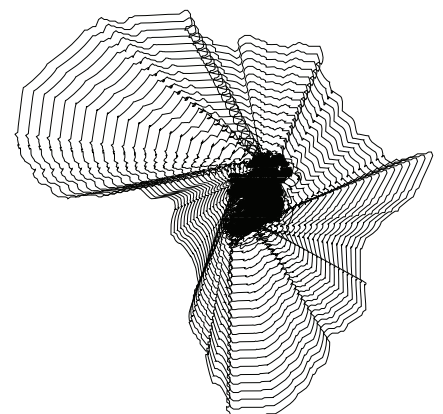
I went to apply for an insurance thing on the phone, they required an HIV test and I suspect it was based on discrimination because I am from South Africa. From their business standards I can see, Africa and the problem of AIDS.<sup>72</sup>

Our participants raised a number of issues in relation to their experiences with policing in Northern Ireland. Several expressed the view that the police pay insufficient attention to racist incidents. They were also convinced of racism within the police service. This is in keeping with other research on ethnic minorities' experiences of policing in Northern Ireland according to which the Chinese and the Travellers communities lack confidence in the police service. Connolly and Keenan (2000) and Mann-Kler (1997) attributed such dissatisfaction to the fact that some police officers had scarce or no interest in racial crimes.<sup>73</sup>

Such a complaint was reiterated by our respondents in several interviews. Consider the following responses:

They do not pay attention. I was attacked beside a police station and the police response was unsatisfactory.<sup>74</sup>

I am not happy with the police – for instance when I and my boyfriend went to report that our windows were broken they paid no attention. They said that since they did not witness the incident they cannot do anything for us.<sup>75</sup>



I have not really had any interaction with the police, personally. But generally, because they are mostly white, they'll support their race. A guy from Zimbabwe was placed behind the bar for six months accused for something he never did. He was eventually released after six months. They went to court several times and he was set free. The police did this because he is black.<sup>76</sup>

I am bothered by the lack of police presence. Sometimes in the area where I live we have youth from different communities (Protestant vs. Catholic) throwing bottles at each other but the police do not arrive. This makes the place unsafe.<sup>77</sup>

Concerns were raised regarding the lack of police presence in rural areas. Some participants also found it problematic that the police were reactionary rather than pro-active, while others felt that the police numbers were insufficient as evidenced by their slow response to incidents.<sup>78</sup>

It is important to note that not all of our respondents were unhappy with the police. Two in particular, noted that they felt very secure and were happy with the police presence.<sup>79</sup> A participant stated that:

I am happy with the police – for instance sometimes, I walk my daughter to school and I see a police presence, this makes both me and my daughter feel safe. Police once came to my house and asked me if I feel safe.<sup>80</sup>

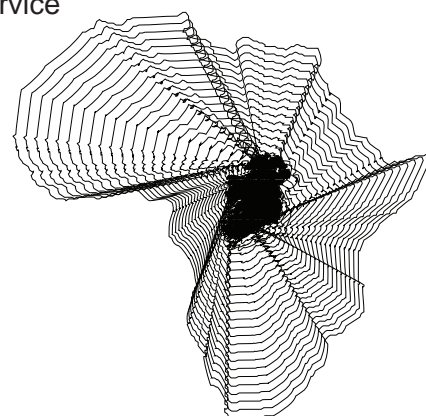
For some respondents the police force in Northern Ireland compared very favourably with that of other countries. Consider the following responses:

Police here are O.K., far much better than the police in Portugal who are brutal.<sup>81</sup>

The police here are doing a better job than where I come from in South Africa. Back home the police are bastards. They are completely useless. In fact the police in South Africa are just like criminals, they are bastards.<sup>82</sup>

While there was considerable dissatisfaction with the police service among our participants, there seemed to be a generally positive view of the health services in Northern Ireland when compared with the health service in countries of origin. According to one participant:

The health services here are very good. Even the idea of buying medicine at the chemist is not so much a burden like some European countries or back in Cape Verde. In some countries poor people cannot afford to be falling ill. But here, I think the arrangements are good.<sup>83</sup>



Nonetheless some concerns were raised with regards to waiting lists and screening for tuberculosis. There was a feeling that hospitals sometimes take too long to attend to emergencies, and significantly that health providers were insufficiently aware of the health needs of people of colour. An informant stated thus:

The health system here is not too bad. But they are not aware of some things. Because of eczema, my sister's skin goes darker and when she goes into hospital when it's severe the nurses don't even know how to deal with that because of the colour of her skin.<sup>84</sup>

There was also general satisfaction with the educational sector in the province:

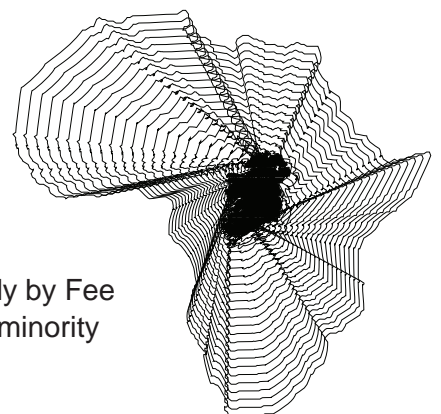
The educational sector is also very good. Students are encouraged – this is far much better than the educational system of Portugal. Here they tell you that they will help you go through the learning process.<sup>85</sup>

Parents felt that their children were having a pleasant time at school and were involved in most activities. Some even remarked that that their sons who go school in Northern Ireland were not discriminated against. However, there were exceptional cases as one participant complained that here children are overburdened with homework:

I have a son at the Dominican College. I am critical about the education system here. I do not understand how they expect my 13 year old son should learn two foreign languages in parallel; Spanish and French and over that, English, which is not even his first language. The education system here has too much homework for children. The schools overload children. You can't real find after school children activities here.<sup>86</sup>

Our respondents were largely happy also with community organisations in Northern Ireland. The involvement by some of them in community organisations ranged from participation in those which were formed and are managed by Africans themselves, to organisations that promote the welfare of ethnic minorities generally, and those which serve the wider community. Organisations which were singled out (axiomatically due to the geographic location of the interviews) included the African and Caribbean Association of Foyle (ACAF); Women of the World, Omagh Ethnic Community Support Group, the Multicultural Resource Centre, the Lisnaskea Historical Society, Art Ekta, and the Portuguese Association, which is based in Dungannon.

These findings are in keeping with previous studies which also indicate that black and ethnic minority groups make advantageous contributions to the Northern Ireland community. An example is the study by Fee Ching Leong (2001), which is focused on the participation of black and minority



ethnic people in volunteering and community activity in the region.<sup>87</sup> According to this survey, black and ethnic minority people perceive volunteering work as a way of promoting understanding, increasing tolerance, and inputting into the wider community. These people were said to be involved in activities that can improve the welfare of their community, and that will also promote the development of society in general. However, it emerged from the survey that there were institutional, cultural and social barriers to participation.

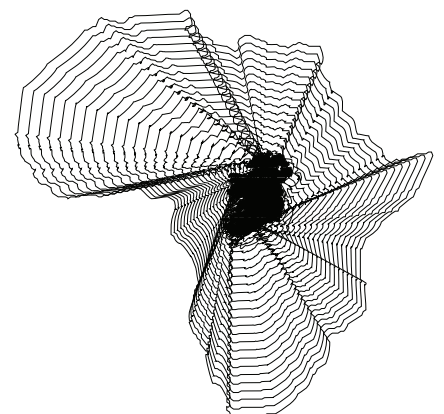
Surprisingly, a remarkable number of participants stated that they did not belong to any association, or never heard of any organisation which takes care of the welfare of African people. This may be easily explained by looking at the geographic location of the interviews. In addition, the participants themselves noted that time constraints and caring responsibilities were also major barriers to their participation. There were some other interesting explanations. For example, an English-speaking participant based in Portadown stated that she could not be involved with the ethnic minorities association in her area as it was dominated by the non-English speaking ethnic minorities. She reported that:

I have no time to get involved with associations. In any case, I cannot even belong to organisations for ethnic minorities in Portadown – there is no point because most of the migrant workers here do not speak English; they are either Lithuanians or Portuguese speaking. I only know 3 people from Zimbabwe who live here.<sup>88</sup>

Another participant gave a different and significant explanation for his non-involvement with community organisations. He stated thus:

I am an immigrant worker and I am scared of being involved in anything since I will end up in jail. I came here with one objective, which is to work.<sup>89</sup>

Actually, evidence gleaned from participant observations indicates that this may be the most important yet unspoken barrier to involvement in community organisations which is specific to Africans living in Northern Ireland.



## Race Relations

Undoubtedly, the most significant challenge yet to be addressed is the issue of race relations. In both the Western area and in Northern Ireland a considerable amount of legislation and policy guidance is available, which seeks to address race relations.<sup>90</sup> Notwithstanding these government initiatives, most of our respondents expressed the view that though people in Northern Ireland are by and large friendly and supportive, Africans are regularly exposed to racism.<sup>91</sup> These perceptions find corroboration in a number of academic writings on the issue of race relations both in the United Kingdom and in Northern Ireland.<sup>92</sup> Interestingly, none of the people interviewed made any reference to legislation or existing policies on racial equality.

A number of observations on the issue of race can be made from the interviews. In the first instance, the majority of those who were interviewed had experienced racism. Even the few who had not been subjected to racism personally believed that this practice exists. These experiences are said to have taken different forms, which include discrimination, physical attacks, destruction of property, verbal abuse/harassment, and racist prejudice.

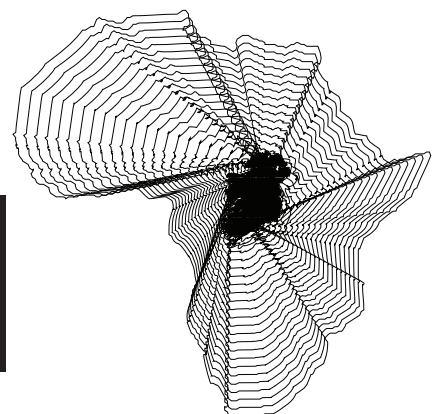
It would appear that physical attacks and destruction of property are common ways of telling Africans that they are not welcome in certain neighbourhoods.<sup>93</sup> In some cases, the message is conveyed expressly. This is what happened to the family of one of our informants:

In 2006 we received a letter which in many words said, you black 'Finians' if you don't move you will see blood or be killed. Eggs were thrown at us.<sup>94</sup>

It should be noted that in a study carried out by Connolly and Keenan in 2000, a quarter of the respondents stated that they would not be willing to have people from ethnic minority backgrounds in their residential area.<sup>95</sup> Most of our informants had experienced analogous racial prejudices in their neighbourhoods: for example, one told us that his neighbours assumed that he was a drug dealer. Interestingly, the stereotype of African males as drug dealers came up also in the course of informal discussions in our participant observations.

Discrimination tends to be associated especially with practices in the workplace: there is a feeling that tougher jobs are reserved for immigrants, and that Africans are expected to work twice as hard as local staff. A participant stated thus:

In relation to racial discrimination, I think I work very hard for long hours while my colleagues are up to no good. They are doing fuck all whole day! We were the first three black women in the company. The Irish women did not face the same issues





or problems we had to endure at the poultry farm when I worked there.<sup>96</sup>

Similar views were expressed by another informant who stated that:

The situation was whereby you are supposed to start work by 2pm and clock in. By the time you clock in they want me to perform multiple tasks while the rest of the staff who are supposed to clock in are still talking and sitting there. So I have to do four people's duties and they are right sitting and laughing. If I speak to another black person around they don't like it. They give you a warning and want you to be working all the time without resting while they are on the phone doing text messages. The boss is always scheduling the black to work at the odd times of the day, so for example 7pm to 3am and 4pm to 1am.<sup>97</sup>

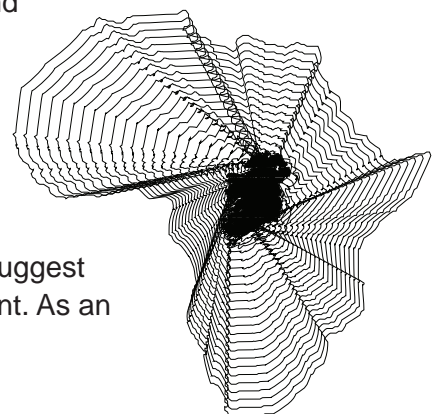
In the workplace there are also stereotypes of Africans as being poor, slaves, less intelligent, dirty and thieves. One participant stated that:

In one occasion, a person I was working for made a racial statement. She asked me 'have you washed your hands?' and I said 'yes, indeed'. She then demanded to know why my hands were 'brown then if I had washed them. At that point I felt really bad. I know my routine is to be hygienic, but this person was really not asking about my dirty hands but dirty skin. She said, 'I didn't see you washing either, it doesn't look washed'. I told her that this was my colour and my hands are washed but she still didn't believe it.<sup>98</sup>

In another case,

A Polish fellow stole a phone at the workplace. They thought it was a black person. Thank God the CCTV camera came with the clear footage that it was the white guy who stole this phone. If you make an official complaint they don't take it seriously.<sup>99</sup>

Verbal abuse and harassment often take the form of name calling. A number of participants reported that they had been called several names including 'nigger', 'brownies', 'coloured', 'spik' and 'bastard'. Connolly and Keenan (2001) have opinionated that most minority ethnic people seem to have accepted this practice as a normal part of their living in Northern Ireland. Chahal and Julienne suggest that this acceptance might be the reason why incidents of racial harassment are not reported.<sup>100</sup> However, the body language and verbal expressions of our participants suggest that they have not really accepted this kind of treatment. As an informant stated:



Some people drove past me when I was waiting for a bus and yelled that we are niggers. It was just here in the university in Coleraine. I ignored them because it wasn't a face to face verbal abuse. They were driving past, but it is bad, it is racism.<sup>101</sup>

Such incidents are not reported because there is a general perception that even if they are, the police would do nothing. As one of our informants stated:

I first experienced racism in Northern Ireland when I went to Belfast with some friends. I left a nightclub there in Belfast and a group of white youths threw bottles of water at us and called us niggers. It was not funny. They yelled out 'niggers' several times. We did not report to the police we just went home. We knew if we reported this matter, nothing really will happen to them. So we just went home.<sup>102</sup>

Some participants made a distinction between what they called 'serious' racism and 'minor' racism; minor racism is often used to refer to incidents of verbal abuse. According to one informant:

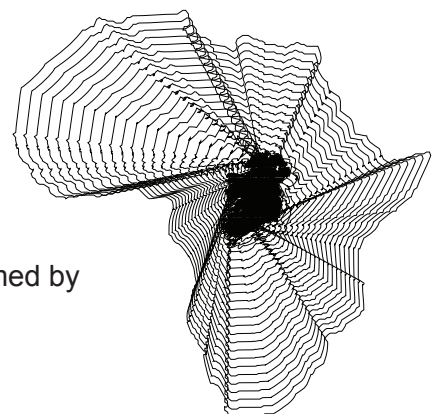
Racism is not much. It is normally the youths who verbally attack us. I have never been seriously racially attacked. Racism exists in Northern Ireland and I hope that the public and business will stop this.<sup>103</sup>

Informants also made references to cases of children who racially abused other children at school. A young adult who had been a victim of this form of abuse as a child explained that at the time she 'used to walk home crying'.<sup>104</sup> She also felt unsupported by teachers who made assumptions that she was not good enough, and gave her marks which she did not deserve. In both this and other cases, the situation changed only after parental intervention.

Careless statements can make some kids feel like they do not belong to this society. An informant stated thus:

Depending on where you are you can pick some insinuations that show that you do not really belong like 'when are you going back to your country'. For my kids it's a big challenge. They have to ask the other kids 'can I play with you'. They are the only black kids in the school. So it is a big challenge to them. But when I took them to London for holiday it was easy for them because they met people of all other races.<sup>105</sup>

At first glance this comment invites the generalisation that Africans think that in England racism is not as evident as in Northern Ireland. On close scrutiny however, such a general view is unsustainable as confirmed by mixed views on the issue. Consider this comment:



I think racism here is not really as evident as it is in England. I have lived in England and there is more racism there. I saw and encountered a lot of racism and reports on the media of people being attacked by whites because of the colour of their skin. Just because they are black!<sup>106</sup>

The participants associated racial prejudice with underlying negative stereotypes, which can be inferred from words uttered by some members of the general public. This is evident also from the way people are treated by the public: most informants told us that they had been to pubs and shops and they were either attended last, though they were the first in the queue, or simply ignored. Below is the experience of one of our informants:

One day I went to a local bar with a friend from here. A farmer in his 60s came and bought me a beer. He then told me that he wanted to 'go with me'. I said 'no' the man then told me that 'you know you are slaves and you are bought like a product, the company brings you into this country it is a business and you are slaves.'<sup>107</sup>

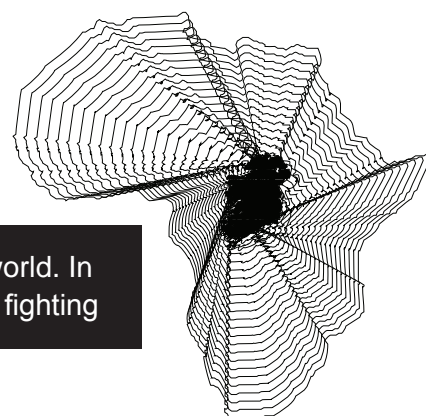
Another related the following incident:

One time I went to a shop to buy a computer here in Ireland. At the shop there were two staff members. They just stood there. For 15 minutes nobody talked to me. Mind you I was the only customer in the shop. I really needed to buy this computer. They told me they were too busy, they were just standing there, I decided to walk out.<sup>108</sup>

The same informant added that her white husband was met with a lot of disapproval when he married her – a black woman. As she told us, 'one of them even cried'.<sup>109</sup> Studies carried out by Brewer and Dowds in 1996 found that more than 30 per cent of the respondents would mind if a relative married a Chinese or an Asian.<sup>110</sup> In 2000, Connolly and Keenan also found that more than half of their respondents minded if their relatives married from either of the two minority groups mentioned above.<sup>111</sup> Thus, in view of our informants' experiences and of the prevalence of marriages between Africans and locals, it would be interesting to have a survey on the host community's attitude towards their relatives marrying an African.

Although some of our respondents were white Africans who had also experienced different forms of racism, most participants attributed racist attitudes to their black skin. A third of the informants clearly made a connection between racism and appearance.<sup>112</sup> Consider the following comment:

There are many problems everywhere in the world. In this country they used to fight a lot. They were fighting





about politics and religion I am told. But I think now, they can see new people, like us immigrants and this is causing them to think that we are their enemies. Just because of the colour of our skin, some people are thinking that we should not be here. We are very few in this country. I don't see the problem. Our number is very small. There are many Europeans coming to my country, to Africa and no one is giving them a problem on racism.<sup>113</sup>

Despite this obvious connection between skin colour and racism, a number of respondents did acknowledge that also Travellers, the Chinese and the Polish (Eastern Europeans) also faced racism.<sup>114</sup> A 'white' African explained that there are some immigrants who are seen as acceptable by this society.<sup>115</sup> Financial hierarchy largely determines how people are treated. He, for example, has a professional job and is treated significantly better than other migrants. Interestingly, some people even complain about immigrants to him.

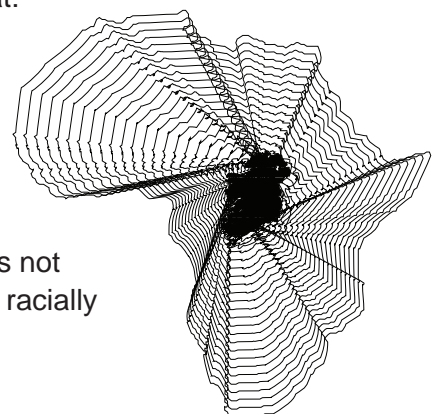
It would be an exaggeration to suggest that black Africans relate with the host community in the same manner, and that immigrants from less developed countries have a sense of solidarity. Africans share the view that racism is practised by some local people as well as other immigrants who can equally be said to be racists. For example, an informant in Portadown complained that his own black Portuguese-speaking community practiced reverse racism by sticking to themselves and refusing to integrate.<sup>116</sup> According to him, some members of his community do not make his English-speaking girlfriend feel welcome into their group:

They treat my partner badly, they would insist on speaking to me in Portuguese in front of my girlfriend even when they can speak English. This escalates into racism. My girlfriend thinks that my community is unhappy with our relationship. They are racist towards her – probably jealousy. I have had no serious racist incidents from the locals. In the Republic 6 years ago men verbally abused me but women seemed to be fascinated by me. Of course, I have been called black bastard etc. here but I ignore this. I think people from here are conscious about racism – they always try to explain their behaviour. I always have a laugh with my local mates at work but some people from my community who work with me oppose such conduct.<sup>117</sup>

A similar concern was expressed by another respondent who stated that:

At work each migrants have a 'company' Philippines, Indians, Irish and everyone has their own grouping and talking and I don't feel as part of it. It is really racist when you have factions based on colour and culture at work<sup>118</sup>.

As a result, any behaviour which makes an individual feel that s/he does not belong and cannot be accepted because s/he looks different is seen as racially motivated.



Throughout our interviews, participants made a distinction between what they called 'direct' racism and 'subtle' racism. Direct racism has been described above, and it often takes many forms including verbal abuse, harassment, physical attacks, and destruction of property. Subtle racism was described by one informant as:

The sense that the person does not treat you with open discrimination but cold attitude and with levity or jokiness. Sometimes they are unnecessarily patronising. They try to make you feel comfortable even when their body language says they are not happy with you being around. Now that is something I call subtle racism<sup>119</sup>

Previous studies have suggested that perpetrators of racist harassment are mostly boys and young men.<sup>120</sup> Our participants stated that young men and boys practice direct racism often after abusing alcohol and other intoxicating substances; they also stated that perpetrators of subtle racism are mostly older men and women. According to one informant:

There is racism in Northern Ireland. I think older people are very racist, I mean those who are 50+. Those who are below 30 tend to be O.K. This is not everybody though since they are others who are O.K. Racism is mainly subtle, it is not direct. You can see signs of discrimination at work.<sup>121</sup>

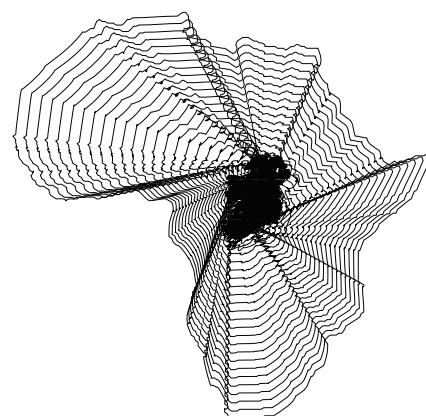
Interestingly, a number of people tried to explain why racism exists in Northern Ireland: some tended to excuse racism which they felt was due largely to lack of awareness of the problem; others compared racial prejudices with 'tribal conflicts' in their own countries. There was a suggestion that some locals cannot understand the idea of highly qualified individuals from countries they regarded as inferior. Another informant thought that racism could be attributed to the fact that the number of immigrants has increased over the years. One informant went further to link racism with global racial tensions. According to him:

But let me tell you, it is the same type of mind that is now throwing bombs in Iraq against the innocent Iraqis. It is a common problem with a common group and identical. I am not afraid of saying this. In Iraq you find Canada, America, Britain, Australia and a lot of other majority white countries causing war there. This kind of thinking is the same thing of a racist mind. That is the problem.<sup>122</sup>

Many of our respondents felt helpless in the face of racism. Some were determined to ignore it:

In fact, if you train your eyes, you will notice racism almost every other day. But I keep myself to myself, I don't bother, I just go on with the little life I have. The authorities can fight that battle on my behalf.<sup>123</sup>

So yes, the prejudice is both open and covert. I am in a stage where I don't care less provided I get the money, my wage. Before, I was bothered.<sup>124</sup>



## Conclusions and Recommendations

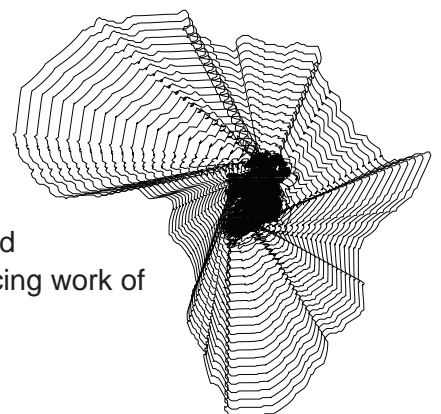
This ethnographic research shows that there is a gradually growing number of in-migrants from Africa especially since 2004. This increase can be attributed possibly to the peace dividend in post-Good Friday Agreement (1998) Northern Ireland.

Despite the increased presence of Africans, many researchers still rely on the demographic data of the last official census by NISRA which was done in 2001. This makes a credible survey of the current presence of Africans in different districts of Northern Ireland rather difficult to estimate. The mid-year reports offered by government agencies are equally problematic because in most cases the focus is on selected African nationalities, usually Nigerians, South Africans, Kenyans or Zimbabweans. Such an exclusive methodological approach marginalises other African groups also present in the North.

Our report indicates a range of African nationalities in the region: many of these migrants are highly educated and multilingual. Most of the Africans interviewed can speak and write fluent English, while others have responded positively to language school training (especially those who speak Portuguese and other African languages).

A large number of our respondents are under-employed, while other economically active Africans are still in unsecure employment – they have either a part-time job or short term contracts, and are mostly in the lower rungs of income earners. This is a recurrent case especially within the nursing sector where some of the interviewees have concerns that they are employed in low-wage auxiliary duties though their qualifications are actually superior. Many have been able to prove that their higher qualifications are not being transferred into the local job economy; while a number of university graduates have voiced their dissatisfaction with low-paid work in places such as fast-food restaurants where they earn meagre wages. Yet, there remains a considerable demand in the job market for high skilled people. In summary, there is a possibility that some kind of unfairness is being experienced by migrant workers in the job market.

Our report gives accounts of commendable work being done by some institutions, especially the health sector and some Local District Councils. Hospitals are rated good; while there is still a degree of suspicion and distrust towards the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), and the way in which it relates to African migrants. Our respondents feel that reporting crime committed against them is a waste of their time. Moreover, 'diversity and awareness in the community' campaigns are perceived as cosmetic add-ons given that for many the real policing work of guaranteeing security and respect is not satisfactory.



This report is an attempt to analyse the feedback from the ethnographic interviews and participants observation of the African community in the West of the Bann. Our respondents raised a variety of issues related to their daily life experiences in Northern Ireland that would require a constructive response from a cross-section of sectors, especially public bodies and civil society. On the basis of the information received from our 50 interviewees, the research team has come up with a number of recommendations: the comprehensive list does not follow a hierarchical order but rather places equal value to each point:

### ■ **Proactive Measures in Addressing Racism**

The majority of the respondents have expressed their discontent at the handling of race-related crimes, attacks or violations in society especially in the workplace, in the public sphere and in other common areas of society. More visible race relations work is needed especially with the younger generation.

### ■ **Employer Responsibilities and Statutory Requirements**

Interviewees have objected to the indifference of some employers towards issues of discrimination and prejudice. Racist language has been condoned in some workplaces. It is the responsibility of the employer to guarantee a racist-free work environment for their staff. This is in line with the *Race Relations Order (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003* according to which employers have a duty to protect their employees against unlawful racial discrimination.

### ■ **Skills Transfer**

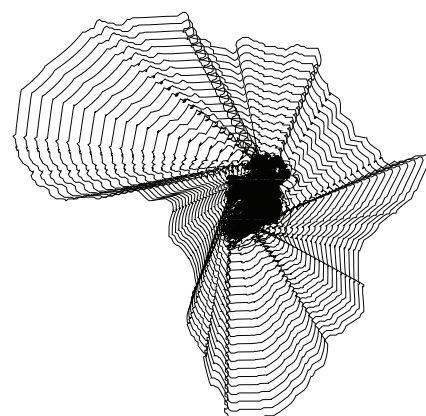
The Department for Employment and Learning should focus actively on skills transfer. The way employers address foreign qualifications and skills in various sectors in Northern Ireland should be revised or radically harmonised so as to avoid inadvertent or conscious discrimination while recruiting. This part of the intervention may include also facilitation of training or language skills for African migrants.

### ■ **Language skills**

The creation of opportunities for increased inter-racial interaction and more English language classes ought to be a priority as opposed to reliance on interpreters and bilingual staff.

### *Research into African Migrants in Northern Ireland*

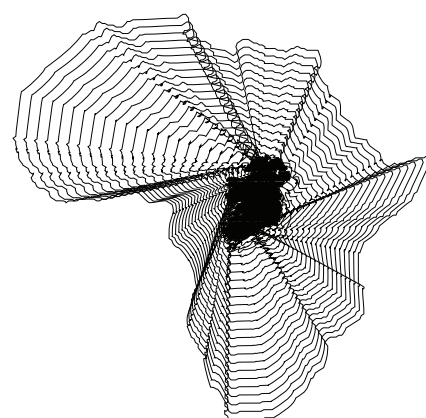
A well strategized and more extensive commissioned research on the African community in Northern Ireland is required. Demographic and quantitative research should be prioritised as there is an urgent need to conduct both a quantitative and qualitative survey of the African population throughout the region. Such research should focus on the interactions between Africans and the host communities.



## ■ Cross-border Research

There is a growing transnational movement of Africans to both the South and North of the border. In fact, a significant number of Africans cross the border to Letterkenny on a regular basis. Research which is confined solely to the Northern Ireland region cannot present a holistic picture.

In conclusion, most of our respondents are in Northern Ireland for long-term rather than short-stay. This element should be used to gauge better understanding, and to promote ethnic diversity and better policies for migrants. If this report is a microcosm of what is felt among the larger community of Africans, then overall, it is also facing numerous difficulties in the encounter with both the public and the private sector services and provisions, which could be addressed otherwise if there is goodwill from community leaders. As migrant workers, naturalised citizens, students, asylum seekers or refugees, Africans who live in the region are significant stakeholders among the population of Northern Ireland. As such, they should be able to enjoy the same basic and inalienable human rights as that their compatriots, the host citizens. This preliminary research shows that at the moment a lot of work still needs to be done.

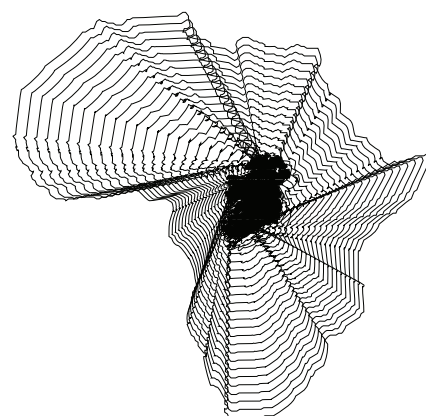




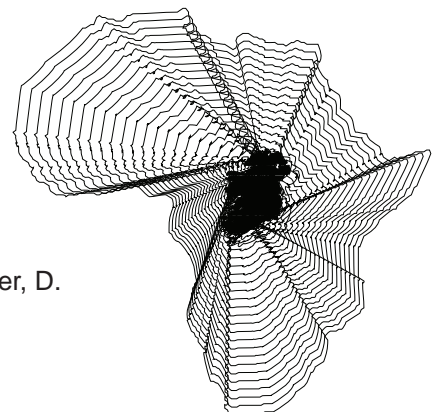
## Endnotes

### (Endnotes)

- 1 See for example Ivan Van Sertima [ed] (1986); D. Killingray (1994); Raphael-Hernand (2003); Jurgen Jensen (2004); Ahmed Al-Shahi and Richard Lawless [eds.] (2005); Curzon and T. F. Earle and K. J. P. Lowe [eds.] (2005).
- 2 S. Smith, and F. Mutwarasibo (2000); J. Komolafe, J. (2002); W.A. Hart (2002); A. Ugba (2004); Theophilus Ejorh (2007).
- 3 See for example Donald Harman Akenson (1992); Thomas G. Mitchell (2000); Maria Ericson (2001); Benjamin Gidron, Stanley N. Katz and Yeheskel Hasenfeld [eds.] (2002) Colin Knox and Rachel Monaghan (2003).
- 4 W.A. Hart (2002).
- 5 R. Hansen (2000).
- 6 R. Hansen (2000). See also Carter, B., Harris, C. and Joshi, S. (1993); Powell, E. (1991) Spencer Ian R. G. (1997); Goulbourne, H. [ed] (1990).
- 7 See for example Bimal Ghosh (ed) (2000), and NISRA (2006).
- 8 See for example Koopmans, Ruud and Statham, Paul [eds.] (2000) Ugba, A (2004); Roston, Bill and Shannon, Michael (2002); Rob Berkeley, Omar Khan and Mohan Ambikaipaker (2006).
- 9 See for example Irwin, G., and Dunn, S. (1996); Christopher McCrudden (1983); McDermott, P. (2008); Pilkington, A. (2003); and Modood, T & Berthoud R [eds.] (1997).
- 10 Omi Consultancy (2005).
- 11 Origination; the Race Debate, Channel 4 TV.
- 12 Examples are South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho and Namibia.
- 13 For example, y40 stated that; 'I came to Northern Ireland in 1981. I am a British citizen now but I am African, from Ethiopia'.
- 14 Institute for Public Policy Research (2007)
- 15 2002 Ireland Census, Central Statistics Office Ireland.
- 16 Daniel Holder (2003).
- 17 Daniel Holder (2003).
- 18 Table S314.
- 19 Kathryn Bell, Neil Jarman and Thomas Lefebvre (2004).
- 20 McDermott, P. (2008).
- 21 NISRA (July 2005).
- 22 This is deployed by the Office of National Statistics to estimate international migration. However, the IPS survey only samples 0.2% of all Travellers. Thus, its real estimates, including those of Africans travelling to Northern Ireland, are almost negligible.
- 23 NISRA (July 2005).
- 24 NISRA (July 2007).
- 25 This respondent preferred to identify himself as European and African
- 26 See for example Y37.
- 27 Y37.
- 28 Ugba (2004).
- 29 Y24.
- 30 Y42.

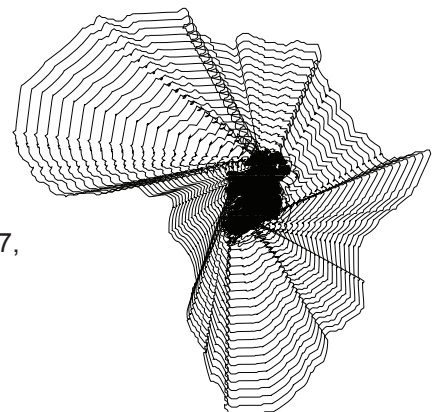


- 31 Y18.
- 32 Y30.
- 33 Y34 and Y39.
- 34 Y41.
- 35 Y9.
- 36 Y4.
- 37 Y10.
- 38 Census (2001).
- 39 Y22.
- 40 Y1.
- 41 See; Dunn, S. [eds.] (2001); Hansson, U., Morgan, V., and Dunn, S. (2002); Holder, D. (2003) Mann-Kler, D. (1997).
- 42 Ibid, see in particular; Dunn, S. [eds.] (2001).
- 43 Barnados (1995).
- 44 Barnardo's (1995); Ginnety, P. (1998); Mackin, A. (2000).
- 45 Y38.
- 46 Y37.
- 47 Y49.
- 48 Y45.
- 49 Y43.
- 50 Y46.
- 51 Y44.
- 52 Y47.
- 53 Y50.
- 54 See NISRA (2005).
- 55 Y17.
- 56 Y8.
- 57 Y19.
- 58 Y22.
- 59 Y21.
- 60 Y29.
- 61 Y17.
- 62 Y46.
- 63 Y48.
- 64 Y25.
- 65 Y18.
- 66 Y22.
- 67 Y22.
- 68 Y49.
- 69 Y43.
- 70 Statutory Rule 1997 No. 273 (C. 14), Race Relations (1997 Order) (Commencement) Order (Northern Ireland) 1997 [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/sr/sr1997/Nisr\\_19970273\\_en\\_1.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/sr/sr1997/Nisr_19970273_en_1.htm)
- 71 Y48.
- 72 Y21.
- 73 Connolly, P., and Keenan, M. (2000); and Mann-Kler, D. (1997). See however; Jarman, N. (2002).

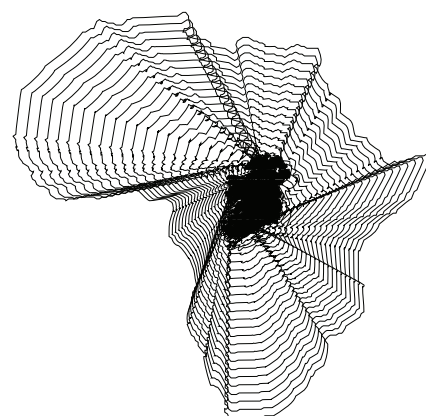




- 74 Y41.  
 75 Y46.  
 76 Y22.  
 77 Y45.  
 78 Y11.  
 79 Y1 and Y47.  
 80 Y47.  
 81 Y44.  
 82 Y11.  
 83 Y15.  
 84 Y13.  
 85 Y45.  
 86 Y7.  
 87 Leong, F.C. (2001).  
 88 Y47.  
 89 Y43.  
 90 These include The Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, S.I. 1997 No. 869 (N.I. 6), Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998; Sections, 26, 76 and 92 Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, the new Targeting Social Need (TSN) and Promoting Social Inclusion agenda (1998) and Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFM/DFM) (2005a).  
 91 According to Y2: 'Generally the people here are welcoming. The general norm is that there is an effort by most people to appear welcoming and supporting. I feel that may be only 5% have the problem. I think it is about that percentage, really'.  
 92 See; Irwin, G., and Dunn, S. (1996); Jarman, N. (2002); Mann-Kler, D. (1997); Connolly, P. & Keenan, M. (2001); Solomos, J. (2001); and Solomos, J. (2003).  
 93 Y8.  
 94 Y24.  
 95 Connolly, P. & Keenan, M. (2000a).  
 96 Y14.  
 97 Y22.  
 98 Y9.  
 99 Y22.  
 100 Chahal, K. & Julienne, L. (1999).  
 101 Y7.  
 102 Y3.  
 103 Y50.  
 104 Y24.  
 105 Y37.  
 106 Y11.  
 107 Y4.  
 108 Y9.  
 109 Ibid.  
 110 Brewer, J. & Dowds, L. (1996).  
 111 Connolly, P. & Keenan, M. (2000a), *supra* note ix.  
 112 Y9, Y10, Y11, Y14, Y15, Y17, Y22, Y23, Y24, Y25, Y26, Y27, Y30, Y37, Y46, Y47, and Y49.  
 113 Y27.

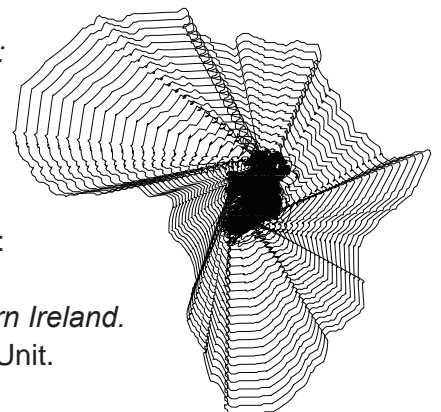


- 114 Y1, Y13, Y14.  
115 Y21.  
116 Y46.  
117 Ibid.  
118 Y4.  
119 Y2.  
120 Jarman, N. (2002).  
121 Y47.  
122 Y28.  
123 Y19.  
124 Y17.  
125 AU, Member States <http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/memberstates/map.htm>  
126 UNFPA, Demographic, Social and Economic Indicators.  
127 Grimes, B. F. (2000).  
128 Sommer, Gabriele in Brenzinger, Matthias [ed]. (1992).

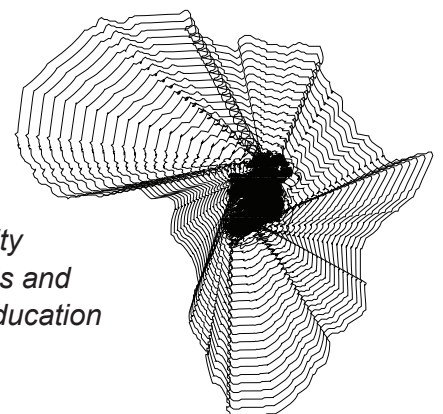


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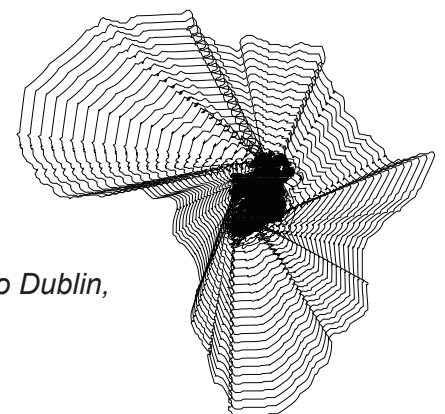
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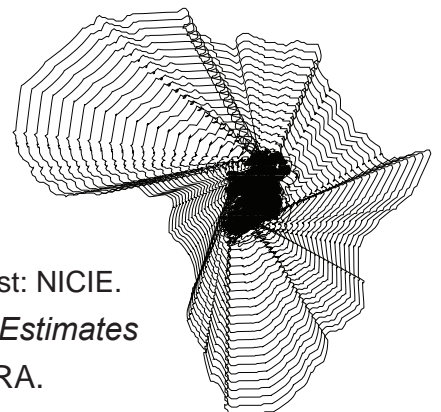


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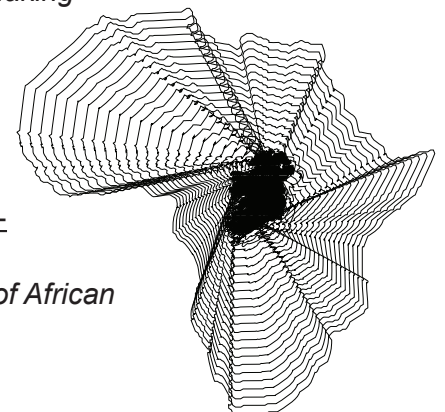


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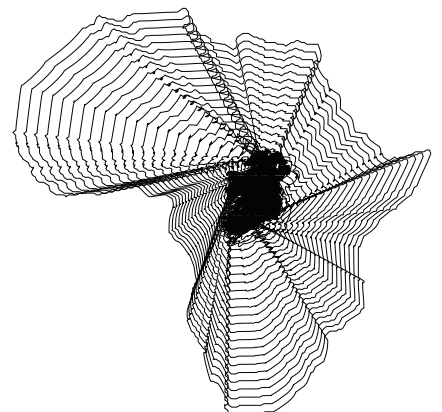




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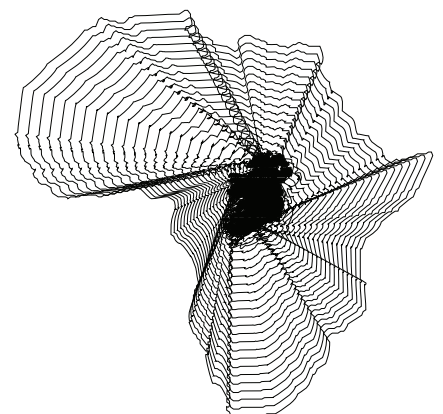
## APPENDIX 1

### Research Team

**Máiréad Nic Craith** is Director of the Academy for Irish Cultural Heritages, University of Ulster. She has previously been attached to the University of Liverpool and University Colleges, Dublin and Cork. She is author and editor of ten books including *Europe and the Politics of Language* (2006), *Culture and Identity Politics in Northern Ireland* (2004) and *Plural Identities Singular Narratives* (2003). She was joint winner of the 2004 Ruth Michaelis-Jena Ratcliff research prize for folklife. In 2006 she was awarded a Senior Distinguished Research Fellowship at the University of Ulster. She shared the McCrea Literary prize in 2008.

**Elly Omondi Odhiambo** is Research Associate in African Migration at the Academy for Irish Cultural Heritages, University of Ulster. He holds a Masters in Peace and Conflict Studies. He has worked in the field of corporate, social responsibility and taught Development modules in Sociology. He is also a freelance journalist in the print and online media. Elly is currently working on a research project entitled 'Giving Voice to New Voices: Africans in the West of the Bann'. This research study has been funded by the Community Relations Council and European Union Peace II Programme and this support is gratefully acknowledged. As a community activist, Elly chairs the African and Caribbean Association of Foyle.

**Khanyisela Moyo** is a Research Associate in African Migration at the Academy of Irish Cultural Heritages, University of Ulster. She is also the vice-chairperson of the Afro-Community Support Organization of Northern Ireland (ACSONI). She holds a Bachelor of Laws, LLB (Hons), from the University of Zimbabwe, and a Master's degree in International Human Rights Law from Oslo, Norway and an LLM in Public International Law from Nottingham University, United Kingdom. Currently, she is in the final stages of a doctoratal research in transitional justice with the Transitional Justice Institute at the University of Ulster, Northern Ireland.



## APPENDIX 2

### Websites of Some Useful Organisations

ACAF African and Caribbean Association of Foyle

<http://www.acafni.org>

Al Nisa Muslim Women Group

<http://www.al-nisa.org.uk/>

ACSONI Afro Community Support Organisation Northern Ireland

<http://www.acsoni.com/>

Department of Education NI

<http://www.deni.gov.uk/>

Embrace NI

<http://www.embraceni.org/>

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

<http://www.equalityni.org/>

Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland

<http://www.hscni.net/>

Human Rights Consortium (Bill of Rights Northern Ireland)

<http://www.billofrightsnri.org/>

JCWI Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants

<http://www.jcwi.org.uk/>

Law Centre NI

<http://www.lawcentreni.org/>

MCRC Multi-Cultural Resource Centre

<http://www.mcrc-ni.org/>

Metro Éireann newspaper

<http://www.metroeireann.com>

MWSN Migrant Workers Support Network

<http://www.mwsn.org/>

NCCRI National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (Ireland)

<http://www.nccri.ie>

NICEM Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities

<http://www.nicem.org.uk/>

NICIE Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education

<http://www.nicie.org/>

NICVA Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action

<http://www.nicva.org/>

Northern Ireland Public Libraries

<http://www.hscni.net/>

OFMDFM Office of the First Minister & Deputy First Minister

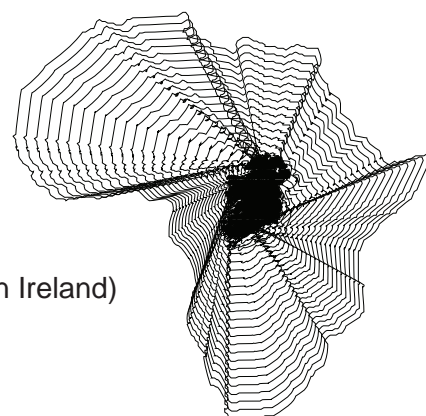
<http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/>

Omagh Ethnic Communities Support Group

<http://www.omaghcommunityhouse.com/>

RAG Refugee Action Group (Useful Contacts Northern Ireland)

<http://refugeeactiongroup.com/contacts1.jsp>



Refugee Council

<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/>

Runnymede Trust

<http://www.runnymedetrust.org/>

S.T.E.P NI South Tyrone Empowerment Programme

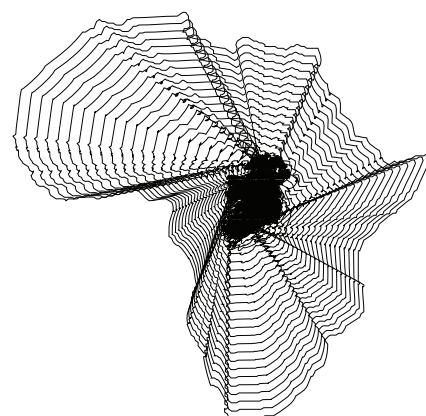
<http://www.stepni.org/>

SEEDS. Solidarity Equality Education Diversity Support

<http://www.seeds.ie>

The African Voice newspaper

<http://www.theafricanvoice.ie>



### Appendix 3

#### A Guide to Africa





### A Guide to Africa

There are 53 countries in the African continent<sup>125</sup>; its population (2007) is of 945,3 million people<sup>126</sup>. Africa is a continent of relevant cultural, social, economic and political diversity. With the only exception of Liberia and Ethiopia, all of the African countries were colonised by a European country at one stage. Most of them attained independence from colonial rule in the 1960s.

### Religions

In Africa there are numerous religions: these are mainly African traditional religions, which are based *inter alia* on African belief systems, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. To date, Islam and Christianity are the two largest religious beliefs for following and practise.

### Languages

According to UNESCO, Africa is the most linguistically diverse continent in the world, with around 2,000 languages spoken<sup>127</sup>. It has been recorded that 140 of these languages have less than 500 speakers<sup>128</sup>; therefore, they are classified as endangered or almost extinct. For the purposes of this research report on Africans in Northern Ireland, West of the Bann, it is important to note the relevance of European languages as a historical consequence of colonial rule; in fact, French, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Afrikaans/Dutch, Italian and German are also spoken in the continent.

### Cultures

Africa has a diversity of cultures: because of this heterogeneity there is not one single culture called 'African'. This means that one cannot simply speak 'African', or express an 'African' culture because there are thousands of distinct African customs, traditions, histories and ways of life.

